

Lloyd R. Smith House
2220 North Terrace Avenue
Milwaukee
Milwaukee County
Wisconsin

HABS No. WIS-272

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. WIS-272

LLOYD R. SMITH HOUSE

Location: 2220 North Terrace Avenue (east side of North Terrace Avenue at the east end of East Ivanhoe Place), Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

Present Owner: Milwaukee County

Present Occupants and Use: Villa Terrace, Museum of the Decorative Arts, operated by the Milwaukee County War Memorial Center and the Milwaukee Art Center. The building houses a fine collection of furniture, china, glass, silver, and the like, with some items dating from as early as the sixteenth century, but with emphasis on British and American pieces of the mid-seventeenth through early nineteenth centuries. Exhibition rooms and offices occupy the south and east wings; a caretakers' quarters is in the north wing.

Statement of Significance: Inspired by Italian Renaissance villas, this attractive, well-preserved building, for forty years a private residence and now a public museum, is an admirable example of the traditional architecture built in this century and of the work of Chicago architect David Adler. Its setting is also noteworthy: The Smith house stands on a terraced, landscaped bluff overlooking Lake Michigan.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1923-24. The application for the building permit (No. 26178) is dated September 6, 1923, and lists the mansion's estimated cost as \$200,000. According to the "Report of Inspection" on file at the General Office, Building Inspection, 1010 Municipal Building, construction was completed and "finishing and decorating" in progress by November 3, 1924.
2. Architect: David Adler (1882-1949) of David Adler & Robert Work, 220 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago. A native of Milwaukee, Adler had studied architecture at Princeton University and at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts before opening his office in Chicago in 1912.

He was associated with Robert Work from 1917 to 1928, and was elected a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1941. Throughout his career Adler specialized in residential design, "dealing freshly with traditional styles and conventional forms."

3. Original and subsequent owners: The mansion, originally called Sopra Mare, was built for Lloyd R. Smith, an executive of the A. O. Smith Corporation, and was donated to the Milwaukee Art Center, Inc. in 1963-66 by Smith's widow, Mrs. John Jacob Curtis. On April 20, 1966, Maurice W. Berger, president of the Art Center, presented the deed to the property to John L. Doyme, Milwaukee County Executive. Rechristened the Villa Terrace, its new name reflecting its address, setting, and style, the former residence opened as a museum in June of the following year.
4. Builders and suppliers: The permit application was signed by Grunewald & Dunlop--Charles Grunewald and Charles Dunlop, who are listed in city directories of the period as mason contractors. According to Mrs. Curtis, John Debbink of Milwaukee was the carpenter contractor. In Stroll Thru Villa Terrace, it is stated that the woodwork in the library and other areas was created by Milwaukee's Matthews Brothers and the wrought-iron fences, gates, railings, and grilles by Cyris Colnik, a noted local craftsman. Materials used in construction and finishing came from Europe as well as this country: pebbles for the cortile paths from the shores of Lake Michigan, brick from Illinois, the antique wall-covering in a guest room from France, stone columns in the courtyard arcade and tile for floors and roof from Italy--to cite several examples. The original furnishings included sixteenth and seventeenth century antiques which Mrs. Curtis had selected in New York with the assistance of David Adler (and in the areas that once were living room, dining room, and library much of this furniture remains, donated to the Villa Terrace by Mrs. Curtis).
5. Original plans: Richard Pratt, author of David Adler, writes that the Smith house plans are among the many blueprints and tracings from Adler's firm in the possession of the Art Institute of Chicago, but that the collection includes no original sketches or notes for this residence by the architect himself. Blueprints of first- and second-story plans, dated August 25, 1923, are preserved at the Milwaukee Art Center.

6. Alterations and additions: There have been no major alterations and no additions. A summary sheet on file at the General Office, Building Inspection, lists a permit for relocation and replacement of radiators by the Thomas E. Hoyer Heating Co. in 1956; and the file also contains records relating to changes made when the mansion became a museum. To bring the building up to code, the new owners were required to install fire resistive doors, fire escape, exit lights, and hand-rails on all stairways and to make "corrections in the electrical wiring." Permits issued to the Herman Andrae Electrical Co., Selzer-Ornst Co., and Wisconsin Fire Escape Construction Co. in 1967 document these alterations. Electrical work included installation of electric lights in the former living room, which had been lighted by candles in chandeliers and sconces. Finally, at an unspecified recent date, the wooden shutters were removed.

B. Historical Event Connected with the Structure:

The Milwaukee Landmarks Commission named the Lloyd R. Smith house a Landmark in 1968.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Photographs of exterior and interior pre-dating conversion of the house into a museum appear in the publications of Richard W. E. Perrin listed below and in the Milwaukee Journal for December 10, 1963. As regards unpublished views, the recorder has been informed by Mrs. Curtis that she still has a number of photographs of her former residence.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Adler, David and Work, Robert, Architects, blueprints of first and second story plans of Smith house, dated August 25, 1923, in the collection of the Milwaukee Art Center, Milwaukee County War Memorial Center, Milwaukee.

Atkinson, Tracy, Director, Milwaukee Art Center, letter of July 22, 1970 to recorder, in recorder's files.

Building permits and other records, 1923-67, General Office, Building Inspection, 1010 Municipal Building, Milwaukee.

Curtis, Mrs. John J., Darien, Connecticut, letters of August 28 and October 12, 1970 to recorder, in recorder's files.

Inspection of fabric June 24, July 29, October 18 and 21, 1970.

Interviews with Mrs. Anne K. Donovan, Exhibition and Curatorial Administrator, Villa Terrace, July 29 and September 4, 1970.

Pratt, Richard, Stonington, Connecticut, letter of October 19, 1970 to recorder, in recorder's files.

Records of ownership, Records and Research, 509 City Hall, Milwaukee.

Wilczynski, Beatrice, Reference Assistant, Burnham Library, Art Institute of Chicago, letter of September 9, 1970 to recorder, in recorder's files.

b. Secondary and published sources:

"Art Trustees Accept Villa," Milwaukee Journal, December 10, 1963, Part 2, 5.

Atkinson, Tracy, Villa Terrace Inaugural Exhibition June 11 Thru June 30, 1967, Milwaukee, 1967.

Hagen, Lois, "Villa Will Be Showplace for Decorative, Fine Art," Milwaukee Journal, December 10, 1963, Part 2, 12-13.

Key, Donald, "Art Center Will Consider Curtis Villa Offer Monday," Milwaukee Journal, December 6, 1963, Part 2, 1.

"Landmarks Commission to Cite Pabst Theatre, 5 Other Buildings," Milwaukee Journal, October 13, 1968, Part 7, 7.

Milwaukee City Directory.

Milwaukee County War Memorial, Milwaukee, 1968.

Milwaukee County War Memorial Center, Inc., "Information Sheet," April 20, 1966.

Perrin, Richard W. E., The Architecture of Wisconsin, Madison, 1967, 115-116.

Perrin, Richard W. E., Milwaukee Landmarks, Milwaukee, 1968, 100-103.

Pratt, Richard, David Adler, New York, 1970.

Roberts, Patricia, "Their Collections Lend Museum Quality," Milwaukee Journal, May 28, 1967, Part 6, 1, 6.

Ryhn, Winifred, Stroll Thru Villa Terrace, Milwaukee, 1967.

Withey, Henry F. and Elsie R., Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased), Los Angeles, 1956, 10-11.

Prepared by Mary Ellen Wietczykowski
1111 North Astor Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
October 21, 1970

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: In plan the Smith house follows ancient Mediterranean custom, with living quarters on three sides of an arcaded central courtyard that is--on the fourth side--protected from the street by a high wall. In style it resembles Italian villas of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In design and spirit, it embodies both simplicity and luxury, ease and formality.
2. Condition of fabric: Very good. Superior materials and workmanship went into the construction of this house, and it has been carefully maintained over the years.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 108 feet 10 inches north-south by 128 feet east-west; north, east, and south wings consist of two stories plus basement; there is an attic above the east wing; the arcaded west wall is one story in height.

2. Foundation: Concrete
3. Wall construction: Red Illinois common brick has been painted white with simple gray stone trim about door and window openings on the first and second stories; gray stone columns are in courtyard arcades, along courtyard balcony, supporting second story porches at northeast and southeast, and supporting roofs of these porches.
4. Chimneys: There are six painted brick chimneys, one each on the north and south wings, four on the east wing.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: An intricate wrought-iron gate set in the arched doorway in the west wall opens onto the courtyard. The main entrance to the house proper is a rectangular four-panel walnut door opening off the southeast corner of the cortile and leading into the foyer-stairhall in the east wing. At the northeast corner is a second four-panel door opening into this wing; a third panelled rectangular door (in this case a six-panel unit) joins the courtyard and north wing. French doors connect both east and south wings with the courtyard and the second story, east wing, with the balcony overlooking this space. In the east elevation, east wing, are French doors giving access to the first-floor terrace and second-story porches, while French doors on the second floor, north, south, and west elevations, open onto iron balconies. In addition, there are two sets of French doors in the south wall of the former library (south end, east wing). In the north elevation are two basement entrances--both panelled rectangular wooden doors, one of them located in a recessed vestibule--and a service entrance on grade consisting of a panelled rectangular wooden door, glazed above the lock rail, and having rectangular sidelights and an elliptical transom. On the south side, at basement level, is the broad, arched opening leading to the garage and, within the garage vestibule, a panelled wooden door opening into the basement.
 - b. Windows: Two leaf, rectangular casement windows with wrought-iron grilles covering a number of the openings can be found on the basement, first, and second stories. Gray stone trim frames the first and second floor windows.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape and covering: There are gabled roofs above the north, east, and south wings, as well as over the west arcade in the courtyard. A hipped roof is above the attic; shed roofs are above the north, east, and south bays of the courtyard arcade (east, south, and west galleries have cross-vaulted ceilings; ceilings of the north gallery and balcony are beamed). All roofs are covered with orange-brown barrel tile.
- b. Framing: Timber
- c. Cornice and eaves: The cornices are of wood and carved stone. The eaves are of wood, carved stone and tile.
- d. Dormers: Three gabled dormers are in west elevation, east wing.

7. Stairways: On the north, two concrete staircases lead from grade to basement level; within the courtyard, at the northeast corner, a concrete staircase joins the courtyard level with the balcony; on the east, two stone staircases, with stone railings, balusters, and newels, lead from the paved terrace on the first-story level to the lawn and gardens below. The latter area, in turn, is connected by two staircases to a second paved terrace, from which twin stairways lead on down the bluff to lawns and formal gardens at the level of Lake Michigan.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The Smith house is arranged about a central courtyard. The north, south, and east wings are two stories high, while the west arcade is one story. The enclosed courtyard is surrounded with low walls of brick and stone, forming pedestals for the columns of the arcade.
 - a. Basement: The laundry, heating equipment, storage area and cellar are located in the basement, which extends beneath the north, east, and part of the south wings. The garage is located under the terrace on the east side of the house.

- b. North wing: Presently housing the caretaker, this wing originally contained the servants' area, the kitchen, and pantrys. On the first floor, from west to east, are the cook's rooms, the storage pantry, kitchen, and the butler's pantry. The caretaker's suite occupies the western portion of the second floor.
 - c. East wing: The former living room (Great Hall) is located in the center of the first floor of this wing, which is oriented along a north-south axis. To the north is the dining room with a service hall that has access to the kitchen. Immediately to the south of the Great Hall is the foyer-stairhall and--separated from the stair by a north-south wall--the flower room, which is a small room facing the terrace and connecting the Great Hall to the library. The library is located in the building's southeast corner. The dining room, living room, flower room, and library all open onto the paved terrace to the east, which has vaulted, colonnaded porches at the north and south corners. On the second floor of the east wing are three bedrooms; the center of these is separated from the other two by small rooms on its north and south sides. The north and south bedrooms have sunporches and balconies opening to the east and all second floor rooms in this wing are located off of the corridor on the courtyard side of the building.
 - d. South wing: The first floor of this wing, running from east to west contains a powder room, a bathroom, a bedroom, another bath, and--terminating the hallway--another bedroom. The second floor, from east to west, contains three bedrooms. These rooms, as well as those in the east wing, are now used for exhibition space and administrative offices.
2. Stairways: A circular staircase of gray stone, with wrought-iron stair rail, is located in the foyer near the south end of the east wing and joins all three levels of the house.

The attic is reached, at this end, by a wooden stairway. Another wooden stairway, in the north wing, joins the three levels of the house. Short flights of four stone steps with iron handrails join the north and south vestibules of the second floor, east wing, and the

corridor of this wing. A three riser stairway in the north vestibule, second floor, of the east wing leads to French doors which open onto the balcony above the courtyard.

3. Flooring: The floor of the first level is of reinforced concrete and the second floor is timber-framed. Red-brown hexagonal quarry tile is in the foyer, flower room, powder room, service hall, and all main corridors and vestibules; pegged walnut is in the library and living room; brown rectangular tile in the dining room; soft tile in the kitchen and pantry; red-brown rectangular quarry tile is in the second story porches, northeast and southeast corners; while white ceramic tile is in most baths; elsewhere, there is chiefly oak flooring.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: It is largely, lath and plaster. Those given distinctive treatment are described briefly below.
 - a. Ceilings: There is a barrel-vaulted plaster ceiling in the corridor on the second floor, east wing; a ribbed, arched plaster ceiling in the corridor, first floor, south wing; a plaster ceiling arched at the east and west ends in the corridor, second floor, south wing; a vaulted plaster ceiling in the bath off the dressing room, east end, second floor, north wing; beamed Georgia pecky cypress ceilings in living room (Here the ceiling is hand-stenciled.), dining room, and second-story porches at northeast and southeast; and a panelled, painted ceiling in the bedroom, north end, second floor, east wing.
 - b. Walls: Walnut panelling, built-in cabinets and shelving in the library; walnut panelling is found in the flower room; panelled walls in the powder room at the east end of first floor in the north wing; Delft tile-lined niches in the service hall; built-in cabinets in the pantries and kitchen; built-in closets and storage spaces with panelled doors, having paintings in the upper panels in the dressing room at the east end, second floor, north wing; an antique French wall-covering above the chair rail in the guest room, second floor, east wing; and ceramic tile walls in the baths.
5. Fireplaces: Stone fireplaces are at the north and south ends of the living room; fireplaces are also located in the library and the dining room; the middle room, first floor, south wing; the bedroom at north end, and the guest room on second floor, east wing.

6. Doorways and doors: Most interior doors in the east and south wings are rectangular two-panel walnut units set in plain wood doorways, some of which have been painted. In the north and south walls of the living room are arched three-panel inlaid walnut double doors. Similar arched three-panel walnut double doors connect the flower room and library.
7. Trim: Wood, quarry tile, ceramic tile, and stone. Base in the service hall is Delft tile; marbleized wood trim frames the doors and fireplace in the bedroom at the north end, second floor, east wing.
8. Hardware: Brass and iron
9. Lighting: Electric. Wrought-iron chandeliers and sconces in the living room are said to have been imported from Italy.
10. Heating: Gas

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Smith house stands on a splendid site that slopes down from west to east and then, beyond the east terrace, drops off sharply, with the bluff terminating at the level of Lake Michigan. On the west is North Terrace Avenue; north and south of the house proper are driveways and, beyond these, residences; on the east, below the bluff, are North Lincoln Memorial Drive and the lake. Entrance gates and drives are on the west, but the house is oriented around the courtyard and toward terraces, gardens, and lake on the east.
2. Enclosures: Fences surround the property. Marking the west end is an impressive stone, brick, and wrought-iron fence with two gates giving access to the semi-circular drive in front of the building and to driveways north and south of the house. A wood gate, flush with the building's west wall, opens onto the north driveway, an iron gate onto the south drive. Low walls of brick and stone surround the main terrace, and mark the east side of the lawn below this terrace. There are brick parapets with iron railings and stone trim at second-story porches on northeast and southeast corners of the house.
3. Walks: Courtyard galleries are brick-paved; the courtyard itself has paths of blue-black and white pebbles.

4. Landscaping: Between the semi-circular driveway and fence on the west end of the property are gardens and lawn; there are plantings along the west wall of the house and a lawn south of the south driveway. Within the courtyard are gardens, paths, and a fountain, the focal point of which is the Hermes of the Villa Giustiniani, a first century Roman and seventeenth century Italian work donated to the Villa Terrace by the Milwaukee Art Center Garden Club. Sculpture also ornaments lawns and gardens on the east. Here, below the paved terrace at first-story level, are lawns and gardens, a second paved terrace, and the landscaped bluff, which has been embellished by a waterfall and flanked by narrow staircases leading down to extensive formal gardens and lawns at lake level. Grounds are maintained by Milwaukee County, and the gardens by the Art Center's Garden Club.

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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made during the 1970 Milwaukee Project under the sponsorship of the Milwaukee Landmarks Commission of the City of Milwaukee--Richard W. E. Perrin, Chairman--and were donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey. This project was the continuation of a program to record the historic architecture of Milwaukee begun in 1969, under the joint sponsorship of the Milwaukee Landmarks Commission and the Historic American Buildings Survey, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, Department of the Interior. The project team included architect John Thiel of Milwaukee; architectural historian Mary Ellen Wietczykowski--now Mary Ellen Young--(Milwaukee Landmarks Commission); and photographer Douglas Green. The data was prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by HABS editors Carolyn Heath, Mary Farrell, Candace Reed, and Philip Hamp.